

Why are Rip Currents Dangerous?

Can you spot this rip current?

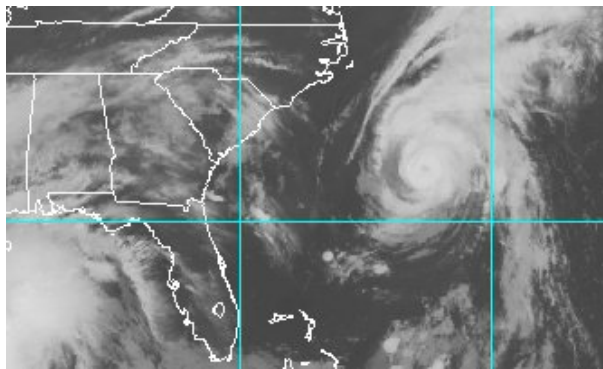
Rip currents can be very difficult to identify in the surf, especially from ground level. If the surf is very rough, then even experienced people have a hard time identifying where the rip currents are. The reflection of sunlight on the ocean (depending on the time of day) may also make the detection of rip currents difficult.



Yes there is a rip current in this picture!
Photo courtesy Carolina Beach Police
Department September 11, 2001.

Good weather ≠ safe surf!

Dangerous rip currents can often occur in otherwise good weather. Just because the weather is nice at the beach, people incorrectly assume that surf conditions will be nice too. Some of the most dangerous rip current events occur when there is a hurricane far off the coast, while at the beaches the weather is beautiful. People do not realize that powerful swells generated by the hurricane will affect the beaches, causing dangerous rip currents.



Many rip current casualties are those with little experience swimming in the surf, and who might not even know what a rip current is. The most important thing to remember is that you can't out-swim a rip current! Remember, it might be moving faster than an Olympic swimmer. Most rip fatalities occur because the victim becomes exhausted trying to swim directly against the current.